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ABSTRACT

Data on a nationally representative sample of 3730 white men aged 15 to 24 in 1966 were obtained from the National Longitudinal Study of the Labor Market Experience of Young Men. The men were interviewed every year from 1966 to 1971, and the surveys provide data on aspirations and employment experiences for each year. Three variables--job aspirations congruence, the categorical stability of jobs and aspirations over one year, and the predictive validity of jobs and aspirations over one to five years--were assessed in parallel fashion. Data revealed the following: (1) eventual congruence of category of job (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional) and apirations was achieved more often by men changing aspirations to match jobs rather than vice versa; (2) aspirations for category of work generally were not as useful as category of jobs for predicting category of jobs held from one to five years later; and (3) the aspirations of lower- and middle-class men were equally predictive of later jobs. Level of work is more important to men than is category of work, and differences between lower-class youth and middle-class youth in their level of job aspirations exist from the earliest ages studied. (MN)

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A CHALLENGE TO VOCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY: HOW IMPORTANT ARE ASPIRATIONS IN DETERMINING CAREER DEVELOPMENT?

Linda S. Gottfredson and Henry J. Becker

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Introductory Statement

The Center for Social Organization of Schools has two primary objectives: to develop a scientific knowledge of how schools affect their students, and to use this knowledge to develop better school practices and organization.

The Center works through four programs to achieve its objectives. The Studies in School Desegregation program applies the basic theories of social organization of schools to study the internal conditions of desegregated schools, the feasibility of alternative desegregation policies, and the interrelation of school desegregation with other equity issues such as housing and job desegregation. The School Organization program is currently concerned with authority-control structures, task structures, reward systems, and peer group processes in schools. It has produced a large-scale study of the effects of open schools, has developed Student Team Learning Instructional processes for teaching various subjects in elementary and secondary schools, and has produced a computerized system for school-wide attendance monitoring. The School Processes and Career Development program is studying transitions from high school to post secondary institutions and the role of schooling in the development of career plans and the actualization of labor market outcomes. The Studies in Delinquency and School Environments program is examining the interaction of school environments, school experiences, and individual characteristics in relation to in-school and later-life delinquency.

This report, prepared by the School Processes and Career Development program, examines the role played by aspirations and limitations on job opportunities in determining career development.

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A Challenge to Vocational Psychology: How Important are Aspirations in Determining Career Development?

Abstract

Nationally representative longitudinal data on 3730 white men aged 15 to 29 were used to assess whether limitations on job opportunity are more important than vocational aspirations in determining later job held. Support was found for two hypotheses: (a) eventual congruence of Holland (1973) category of job and aspirations was achieved more often by men changing aspirations to match jobs rather than vice versa and (b) aspirations for category of work generally were not as useful as category of jobs for predicting category of jobs held one to five years later. The third hypothesis that the aspirations of men with fewer opportunities (lower- versus middle-class men) would more poorly predict later jobs was not supported; categorical aspirations were equally predictive in both groups. This unexpected result led us to additional analyses focusing on level rather than category of work. Results showed that aspirations for level of work are more stable on the average than are aspirations for category of work, supporting the idea that level of work is more important to men than is category of work (the latter being the measure of aspirations in the early analyses). Second, differences between lower-class youth and middle-class youth in their level of job aspirations exist from the earliest ages studied here, suggesting that young men have circumscribed their choices in response to their social position at very early ages. Three recommendations are that vocational theorists and researchers: (a) recognize more explicitly that choices and opportunities are limited for many individuals, (b) pay more systematic attention to the

characteristics of environments and how they influence career development, and (c) examine the extent to which the most strongly-held aspirations (which may be for level rather than for category of work) are largely circumscribed before adolescence and to what extent this circumscription is immune to--or not even addressed by--counseling interventions at later ages. A parallel is drawn between the debate over the potential sex bias of interest inventories and issues which could be raised about race, social class, or ability differences.

A Challenge to Vocational Psychology: How Important are Aspirations in Determining Career Development?

Much of vocational psychology is devoted to understanding and assessing the vocational interests, values, and maturity of individuals so that counselors may better help clients plan for careers. The Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory (Campbell, 1971), the Self-Directed Search (Holland, 1979), and the Career Maturity Inventory (Crites, 1973a) are examples of the numerous inventories that have been developed to assess client characteristics. As career theorists have begun to focus more on the implementation and not just the formation of vocational choices, they have begun to think more about the conditions in the environment that thwart the implementation of career goals and about the means by which people cope with these conditions (Crites, 1976; Krumboltz, Mitchell, & Jones, 1978). Counseling practice and theory nevertheless only marginally acknowledge that the career development of individuals takes place within a broader competition for a limited number of good jobs or jobs of a particular type.

One indication of the foregoing is the widespread assumption in vocational psychology that aspirations for particular types of work play a significant role in determining the kinds of jobs people eventually obtain. It may be, however, that vocational aspirations instead are largely reflections of the kinds of employment experiences people have had, and they may not function as important determinants of future behavior (cf. Roberts, 1968). The jobs that many people enter may be determined in large measure by fortuitous circumstances and the hiring practices of local employers, e.g. by the availability of particular jobs and training programs

in the local labor market, by the information about job vacancies possessed by the social networks of which clients are members, and the preferences of employers for hiring employees of a particular race, sex, social class, or personal appearance. At the very least, we would expect that the careers of people from some socioeconomic groups or particular geographic areas might be especially susceptible to direction or disruption by social conditions beyond their control.

The labor market limits the opportunities available to workers (G. Gottfredson, Holland, & Gottfredson, 1975), and young people beginning their careers must in some way adjust to this reality. One illustration of this is the disparity between the jobs young people say they want and the distribution of jobs actually held by workers older than themselves. In an earlier analysis of white men (L. Gottfredson, 1979), we found that the kinds of aspirations held by 16-year-olds diverged markedly not only from the jobs they themselves held, but also from the jobs held by men in their late 20's. Examining successively older cohorts, we found that aspirations and jobs gradually converged towards each other and towards the distribution of jobs held by older men. Aspiration-job congruence rose steadily and substantially from age 18, and by age 28 about 84 percent of the men reported being in jobs congruent with their aspirations. These results suggested that many men may have changed their aspirations to accord with the jobs available to them. They also suggested that the career development of large sections of the population would be better understood if more systematic attention were paid to characteristics of the labor markets people face in addition to characteristics of the individuals themselves.

A few studies have examined the validity of categorical aspirations

or measured interests for predicting later category of actual job (Dolliver, Irvin, & Bigley, 1972; Zytowski, 1974; Lucy, 1976; Worthington & Dolliver, 1977; Dolliver & Will, 1977), and have shown that predictive validities are high enough to be of practical importance. But we might ask how predictive these aspirations are compared to other possible determinants of future job, such as one's academic attainment, one's work history or current job setting, and so on. Aspirations may be quite predictive of later job, but still be less predictive (and possibly less important causally) than other attributes of individuals or their environments.

This paper takes a first step in testing the importance of categorical aspirations relative to opportunities in determining the course of career development. We do this by examining longitudinal data on category of aspirations and jobs for a large group of young men. Both aspirations and jobs held were classified according to Holland's (1973) typology of work. The major hypothesis being tested is that type of work is determined more by circumstances in the environment and one's opportunities than by one's aspirations. We cannot test this "opportunities hypothesis" directly, because we have no direct measures of what job opportunities and barriers the men actually faced. We can test the hypothesis indirectly, however. If the hypothesis is true, we should expect to find the following.

Hypothesis 1: Incongruence between category of job and aspiration is resolved more often by changing aspirations than by changing category of work.

Hypothesis 2: One's current job rather than one's current aspiration is more predictive of the kind of work a person will be doing several years hence.

Hypothesis 3: Aspirations are less predictive of later jobs among people with presumably fewer opportunities to obtain good jobs than among more advantaged people; specifically, lower-class men should have more

difficulty fulfilling their categorical aspirations than do middle-class men. As we shall see, the results suggest a modified and more complex opportunities hypothesis. But we begin here with our original hypotheses; we will describe the evolution of our hypotheses as we proceed to test them and interpret the results.

Method

Data on a nationally representative sample of 3730 white men aged 14 to 24 in 1966 were obtained from the National Longitudinal Study of the Labor Market Experience of Young Men (Parnes, Miljis, Spitz, & Associates, 1970). The men were interviewed every year from 1966 to 1971, and the surveys provide data on aspirations and employment experiences for each year. The men were not surveyed during the years they were in military service.

Data on aspirations and employment in each of the six years were examined for different age groups. Occupational aspirations were obtained by asking the men each year what job they would like to have at age 30. Aspirations and jobs were coded according to Holland's (1973) 6-category typology of people and jobs: realistic (R), investigative (I), artistic (A), social (S), enterprising (E), and conventional (C). Holland codes for the detailed 1960 census occupational titles used are shown in L. Gottfredson and Brown (1978). Some analyses also examine the status level of work held or aspired to. Duncan's (1961) socioeconomic index scores were used to measure level of work; these scores had already been provided on the data tape for all aspirations and jobs held, so no recoding was necessary.

The predictive validities of category of aspiration and of category of job were examined for five age groups: men 15-16, 17-18, 19-20, 21-22, and 23-24 in 1966. Men were included in the analysis only if they were employed in both 1966 and 1971. Aspirations and jobs in 1966, 1967, 1968,

1969, and 1970 were then compared to the job held in 1971. It should be noted that the jobs analyzed for 1967 through 1970 actually refer to the current job or to the last job if not currently employed. One limitation should also be noted. Because a smaller percentage of 15-16 year-olds than of older men are employed, the younger groups include smaller percentages of the men from those age groups. The percentages of each age group included in the analyses of predictive validity are respectively 44, 61, 73, 86, and 92. This difference in inclusiveness should be kept in mind when evaluating the results.

The analysis of the one-year categorical stability of jobs and aspirations was performed with a different set of age groups. To increase the sample size for this analysis, men of different ages were examined without regard to cohort--that is, without regard to which year it was they were a particular age. For example, the one-year stability of men aged 17 in any initial year was compared to that for men aged 19 in any initial year regardless of the survey year during which this information was obtained. This means that each man could be classified into as many as, but not more than, six age groups. The following age groups are used in the analysis (age being measured at the beginning of the one-year period): 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, and 27. Only men employed and expressing an aspiration in the two consecutive years were included.

All three types of variables--job-aspiration congruence, the categorical stability of jobs and aspirations over one year, and the predictive validity of jobs and aspirations over one to five years--were assessed in parallel fashion. If jobs or aspirations fell in the same Holland category, they were classified as congruent (job vs. aspiration) or stable (job vs. job, aspiration vs. aspiration); if they fell into different categories,

they were considered incongruent or not stable. The degree of congruence, stability, and predictive validity was summarized using Cohen's (1960) kappa. Kappa is the ratio of (a) the proportion of observed agreement beyond the agreement expected by chance to (b) perfect agreement minus chance agreement. It ranges from 0 (agreement expected by chance) to a potential maximum of 1 (perfect agreement).

For the analysis of differential effects by socioeconomic background, men were divided into two groups according to the occupational level of the respondent's father when the respondent was aged 14. The men whose fathers held jobs with Duncan (1961) socioeconomic index (SEI) scores below 30 were classified as coming from lower-class backgrounds; those with fathers having SEI scores of 30 or above were classified as coming from middle-class backgrounds.

No significance levels are shown. The stratified sampling design used in the survey makes the usual formulas for the standard errors of kappa inappropriate. The issues investigated all involve trends in the magnitude of kappa across ages. The regularity in progressions is believed to be more important than statistical significance with these large samples.

Results

Which is more stable over time--category of aspiration or category of job?

Figure 1 provides information about the relative one-year stability of category of job and of category of aspiration from age 15 to 27. The stability of both aspirations and jobs increases with age, and is consistent with the results from other studies (e.g., G. Gottfredson, 1977; Byrne, 1975). For purposes of this paper, however, the more interesting

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Figure 1 About Here

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result is that among the youngest men, aspirations are more stable than are jobs, but the reverse is true of men aged 23 and older.

How is incongruence resolved--by a change of aspiration or a change of job?

Figure 2 shows several types of information about the development of congruence with increasing age. The upper line shows the proportion of men whose category of aspirations and of jobs are incongruent in one year who become congruent the next year. It reveals that the proportion of incongruents becoming congruent increases from about .3 in the teens to .5 by the late twenties. The more basic question--is congruence achieved more often by changing aspirations to match jobs or vice versa?--is answered by the lower two lines. These lines separate the men into three groups according to how aspiration-job congruence was achieved: by changing jobs to match aspirations (the group shown between the upper two lines), by changing aspirations to match jobs (the middle group), and by changing both aspirations and jobs (the lowermost group). These results indicate that changing aspirations to match previous category of job is the most common mode of achieving congruence, that the reverse (changing job to match aspiration) is less common, and that changing both jobs and aspirations is the least common mode of resolution. This is true for all age groups. If we average across all age groups (from data not shown here), we find that 52% of the men achieved congruence by changing category of aspiration, 35% by changing category of actual job, and 13% by changing both.

These results are consistent with Hypothesis 1.

Figure 2 About Here

Which predicts later job better--early aspiration or early job?

Table 1 presents results on the relative ability of category of aspirations and of jobs held at each of five annual interviews (1966-1970) to predict the category of job held at the sixth interview (1971). These results extend findings of other studies (McLaughlin & Tiedeman, 1974; Worthington & Dolliver, 1977); the predictive validities of aspirations and of current (or last) job increase with age and decrease with the length of the interval over which the prediction is made. The table also indicates that predictive validities are higher for aspirations than for jobs in some groups of men but higher for jobs in other groups. Specifically, early categorical aspirations predict 1971 jobs better than do early jobs only when men are very young and when the interval is three years or longer. Note, however, that the kappas are low for these groups, that is, that predictability is low for both jobs and aspirations (cf. G. Gottfredson, Note 1). For the other groups of men, one's current (or last) job--not one's current aspiration--is the better predictor of later job category. The differences in predictive validities for jobs versus aspirations are greatest when the interval is short.

Table 1 About Here

Figure 3 summarizes the trend in predictive validity more clearly. This figure is produced by averaging the kappas for the five different age groups, ignoring differences in the interval over which predictions are made. For example, the average job kappa shown for the 19-20 year-old

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Figure 3 About Here
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group was obtained by averaging three kappas: the 1970 job kappa for men 15-16 in 1966, the 1968 job kappa for men aged 17-18 in 1966, and the

1966 job kappa for men 19-20 in 1966. The average interval over which predictions are made is three years, except for the three youngest groups where it is larger and the three oldest groups where it is smaller. This figure is admittedly a rough portrayal of the trend, but it does neatly summarize the results. Figure 3 shows that although predictive validities are low among the youngest men, they are nevertheless somewhat higher for current aspiration than for current (or last) job. Predictive validities rise with age, but more so for current (or last) job than for aspiration during the mid-twenties. As predictive validities for jobs become quite high, that is, as men enter their late twenties, aspirations appear to "catch up" again in predictive validity as they begin to fall in line more closely with the actual job.

The results for men in their twenties are consistent with Hypothesis 2. The results for men in their teens are not consistent with the hypothesis, but at these younger ages predictive validities are low for both jobs and aspirations.

Are aspirations less predictive of later jobs among lower SES men?

Predictive validities were also calculated separately for men from lower status and those from higher status backgrounds. Results are not shown because the patterns of kappas were similar in the two groups. The hypothesis had been that aspirations would predict later job better among the higher status men because they would face fewer obstacles in implementing their aspirations. The results were not as predicted by Hypothesis 3. Possible explanations of these results are discussed below.

Discussion

Although an analysis of longer intervals would be desirable, the results for the one- to five-year intervals do provide insights into

changes occurring during the critical exploratory and settling-in phases of career development, at least for white men. The categorical stability of jobs and of aspirations, and the congruence of category of aspirations and of jobs increase. The increase for aspiration-job congruence is marked during the twenties and congruence is high by the late twenties. The relatively higher stability of aspirations than of jobs among the youngest men makes sense because these men are both experimenting with different types of work and they are more likely than men in the mid- and late-twenties to have part-time or temporary jobs while they obtain the necessary education or training to pursue their job aspirations. The relatively higher stability and predictive validity of jobs than of aspirations among the older men makes sense because as men age they are both increasingly socialized by their current job environment and increasingly realize that they may be unlikely to overcome the barriers to realizing their goals. Cognitive dissonance in the face of restricted opportunities, some of which may result from the tendency of potential employers to pigeonhole prospective employees according to their past work experience, may also operate to produce changes in aspirations. Consequently, men in their mid- and late twenties are more likely than are younger men to change their goals to reflect their current job situation. But whatever the explanation, it appears that men settle into jobs before they settle into goals.

The results also provide hints about the answer to the much more complex question of the relative importance of aspirations as determinants --rather than mere reflections--of career development. The major conclusion we draw from the results is that even though aspirations may sometimes predict later jobs, they generally predict later category of work more

poorly than do earlier jobs. Although it is true that in a few cases aspirations are more predictive of jobs one to five years later among men aged 18 or younger, the predictions are lowest in these cases with kappas ranging from .13 for a five-year interval to .41 for a two-year interval. As predictive validities exceed .5, jobs are the better predictors. As careers are becoming more stable (as indicated by the stabilities in Figure 1), predictions from aspirations one year earlier are poorer than predictions from category of job held several years earlier. In addition, Figure 2 showed that person-job congruence is achieved most often by modifying aspirations rather than jobs, suggesting that men often accommodate to constraints in their environment by changing their goals. Together, these results suggest that categorical aspirations are weaker determinants of direction of career development than are the circumstances associated with past career development.

By finding support for Hypothesis 1 about methods of achieving congruence and qualified support for Hypothesis 2 on predictive validities, we have provided some indirect evidence for our general "opportunities hypothesis." However, the results are not consistent with Hypothesis 3 about social class differences in the predictive validity of aspirations. Possible explanations for this pattern of results are explored below.

Possible Explanations

The implications of these results for both vocational theory and practice depend on why we find this pattern.

Poor decision-making. One point of view might be that even though categorical aspirations are not currently important in determining the career development of many young people, perhaps they could be in the future with

proper counseling. A theorist or counselor interested in career decision-making skills might say that these young men have demonstrated poor decision-making and so have become locked into careers they need not have been. While this may be the case for some men, two pieces of evidence suggest that this explanation is not the major one for most men.

First, we know that lower-class students get lower scores than do higher status students on tests of vocational maturity (LoCascio, 1974). If poorer decision-making skills do lead to poor vocational choices, we would expect the aspirations of lower-class students (who are the poorer decision-makers) to be less reliable predictors. But our results indicated that the categorical aspirations of lower-class men are no less predictive than are those of middle-class men. Second, and more important, a decision-making skills explanation assumes that better decision-making skills can help most men to avoid the circumstances which limit their career development. But this is doubtful for men in general. As previous work (G. Gottfredson, Holland, & Gottfredson, 1974; L. Gottfredson, 1979) has demonstrated, the types of jobs available in society are limited and thus so are the possibilities for fulfilling early aspirations. This suggests that even if every one had good decision-making skills, some would still have to be employed in jobs they would not choose.

Limited opportunities--a more complex model. To maintain the "opportunity hypothesis" clearly requires a more complex model than we initially proposed, because predictive validities of aspirations are the same for young men with fewer opportunities (lower-class men) as they are for men with more opportunities. A resolution to this puzzle may rest with the possibility that the aspirations most important to these men were not even measured in the study. Aspirations for category

of work were measured but we might hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 4: Aspirations for level of work are more important to men and thus are more tenaciously sought than are aspirations for type of work.

Finding work congruent with one's interests may provide strong intrinsic rewards, but extrinsic rewards such as prestige and pay are associated primarily with level of work. Indeed, economic and sociological theories of occupational attainment often implicitly assume that socio-economic rewards are the only occupational rewards that individuals seek. Although we do not agree with this position, it is possible that many people place higher priority on finding a job that provides a given level of socioeconomic rewards than one which meets a person's vocational interests. It must be noted that research on what makes a job good or bad does not support this hypothesis. For example, Jurgensen (1978) found that among job applicants to a public utility company over the last 30 years, type of work has always been specified as more important than pay and has surpassed advancement and security to become the most highly sought job factor. If we consider, however, that men (our study dealt only with men) often determine the standard of living of their families and are evaluated by their families partly on that basis, we might expect that many men are compelled to strive for a given socioeconomic level to meet social expectations. Although men might personally prefer intrinsic rewards, these rewards are entirely personal and might be more easily sacrificed than the extrinsic rewards important to family members. So if a trade-off between aspirations for type and aspirations for level of work is necessary, we speculate that men will opt for the latter.

On the basis of our new Hypothesis 4, we propose a modified Hypothesis 3 that substitutes level for category of work. Hypothesis 3a: Men with presumably fewer opportunities are less likely than more advantaged men to fulfill their occupational status aspirations as they face the realities of a restricted job market; specifically, lower-class men have greater difficulty attaining their aspirations for level of work than do middle-class men.

Our reasoning was that if aspirations for level are more persistent than are aspirations for type of work, we might find that differential opportunities of lower- and middle-class men result in the latter group being better able to attain their goals than the former--even though both groups are similarly unable to attain types of work consistent with earlier aspirations. The data for examining Hypothesis 3a and Hypothesis 4 are shown in Figure 4 and in Table 2. Figure 4 shows the mean status level of jobs aspired to and of jobs held by men of different ages and in the two social classes. This figure was constructed in the same way that Figure 3 was (from averages of men at the same ages but born in different years) and it includes the same men. (Figure 3 showed trends in predictive validities for Holland type of work.)

Insert Figure 4 About Here

Figure 4 indicates that the mean aspiration levels of both lower-class and middle-class men are extremely stable over almost the full age range. This supports the contention of Hypothesis 4 that men stick tenaciously to their status aspirations. This stability in mean aspirations for level of work contrasts with the much larger change shown by L. Gottfredson (1979) in the net redistribution of types of jobs aspired to by these same young men.

Figure 4 also shows that the gap between aspirations and actual job narrows with age because job level is higher with age. By the late twenties the gap is small for both lower- and middle-class men. Thus, in contrast with how the gap between aspiration for type of work and actual type of work is closed, nearly all of the adjustment of the gap between aspiration and job levels is because mean job prestige levels increase during the early years of working life.

However, the data in Figure 4 are not as supportive of Hypothesis 3a --that lack of opportunities restrict the ability of lower-class men to attain their aspirational levels more than they restrict middle-class men. It does appear at first glance that the teenage aspirations of middle-class men are more nearly met by their late twenties than is the case for lower-class men. For example, the mean level of aspiration for middle-class men aged 16-17 in Figure 4 is only 4 points higher than the mean job level actually attained by middle-class men aged 28-29 (60 vs. 56) while the comparable difference for lower-class men is 9 points (45 vs. 36).

The various age groups in Figure 4 do not represent the same birth cohorts, however, and they include different fractions of the cohorts they do represent. Table 2 provides a more careful test of this hypothesis, because it shows the results for each of five birth cohorts separately.

Table 2 About Here

Hypothesis 3a is not confirmed by the results in Table 2. Table 2 shows the mean level of occupational aspirations in 1966 and the mean level of actual job status in 1971 for each cohort (defined by age in 1966) and the two social classes. Only men employed and expressing an aspiration in both years are included. For only the oldest cohort, men aged 23-24 in 1966, is the match between earlier aspirational level and later level

of job attainment better for middle-class men than for lower-class men. For the younger cohorts, the mean differences are larger for the middle-class men than for the lower-class men.

One conclusion from these results is that the job opportunity differential between lower-class men and middle-class men is not that great because both appear to equally fulfill their initial status aspirations. But the fact is, of course, that throughout the developmental period covered here, the aspirations of the two social class groups are very different. The mean aspirations of the lower-class men are considerably lower than the mean aspirations of the middle-class men. In fact, by the mid-twenties, middle-class men hold higher level jobs on the average than lower-class men even aspire to.

If differential opportunity is an important factor in the relative ability of lower and middle-class men to attain their job aspirations, it must be that men adjust their aspirations to perceived barriers and opportunities long before they enter the labor market. These results are consistent with much sociological research in the last three decades on social class differences in values, expectations, and aspirations (e.g., Kahl, 1953; Wilson, 1959; Gottlieb, 1964; Antonovsky, 1967; Sewell, Haller, & Straus, 1957; Sewell & Haller, 1965; Sewell & Shah, 1968a, 1968b). That research has consistently shown that lower class youngsters have lower occupational and educational aspirations. Some evidence (Stephenson, 1957; Han, 1969; Rodman & Voydanoff, 1978) also suggests that people of different social classes do not differ much in the level of work they wish they could do if they faced no constraints (fantasy occupations), but they do differ in the opportunities they perceive and in their expectations of what they will actually be able to do (possible or probable occupations).

On the basis of the foregoing results on level of work, we propose two additional hypotheses for future testing.

Hypothesis 5: Aspirations for level of work differ by social class because men base their status aspirations largely on their perceptions of what sorts of jobs people of their social position typically get.

Hypothesis 6: Aspirations for level of work are circumscribed in childhood and change little thereafter. These two hypotheses are speculative, but consistent with our results. They are discussed further in the final section of the paper.

At this point it would be helpful to review our results and the conclusions to which they eventually led us.

(1) Congruence of category of job and aspiration was achieved more often by changing aspirations to match jobs than vice versa. Also, earlier aspirations for category of work generally were not as useful as category of earlier jobs for predicting jobs one to five years later.

(2) Lack of opportunity rather than lack of decision-making skills was proposed as a more satisfactory explanation of those results.

(3) The lack-of-opportunity hypothesis was questioned when it was found that there are no differences in the predictive validity of category of aspiration for men from different social classes although we would expect their opportunities to differ.

(4) Additional analyses suggested that opportunities do indeed play a role, but it was not apparent in the earlier analyses because:

(a) Aspirations for level of work appear more stable on the average than do aspirations for category of work, supporting the hypothesis that level of work is more important than category of work (the latter being the measure of aspirations in the early analyses).

(b) Lower-class men aspire to lower level jobs than do middle-class men and the aspirations of both groups are quite stable, suggesting that young men have circumscribed their choices in response to their social position and at earlier ages than were examined here.

Thus the answer to our question "How important are aspirations in determining career development?" depends on which type of occupational aspiration we consider--aspirations for category of work or aspirations for level of work. If we consider category of work, we conclude from our analyses that circumstances (ie., earlier jobs) rather than aspirations may be more potent determinants of later actual job category, and that many men adjust their aspirations to match their jobs. If we consider level of work, the picture may be different. We did not examine the predictive validity of earlier job level relative to aspiration level, but we did show (Figure 4) that on the average the two social class groups had almost attained their aspired-to occupational levels by ages 28-29. We also showed that the levels they aspired to were quite different and that mean levels of aspirations did not change much over the ages examined, which is consistent with other literature showing that aspirations for level of work differ by social class in childhood as well as in adolescence. Our speculation is that men get the level they seek on the average, but they have learned early in life what level is probably feasible for someone of their social position. To what extent outcomes are determined by these aspirations rather than the social constraints that determine these aspirations is an empirical question. As will be discussed later, there is a sociological literature that

specifically examines this question.

Implications for Vocational Theory and Research

We make three recommendations. First, vocational theorists and researchers should recognize more explicitly that choices and opportunities are limited for many individuals. The usual implicit assumption appears to be that aspirations can usually be fulfilled, if only people can be helped to make good decisions. Second, we should pay more systematic attention to the characteristics of environments and how they influence career development. The current emphasis of research is on assessing the individual and rarely on assessing the individual's environment. Third, we should examine the extent to which the most strongly-held aspirations are largely circumscribed before adolescence and to what extent this circumscription is immune to--or not even addressed by--counseling interventions at later ages. Currently there is only occasional discussion of the relevance of assessment devices to the spectrum of problems counselors face in helping their clients, particularly disadvantaged clients. There is also little discussion of the ages at which interventions are likely to be successful.

Our recommendations are not novel by any means, and readers might justifiably argue that vocational theory itself explicitly makes the same recommendations. We maintain, however, that current work is notably weak in these three areas and so for all practical purposes those recommendations have been ignored.

(1) Recognize that the labor market limits the opportunities available to many people.

Probably few, if any, vocational theorists or researchers would main-

tain that people can train for and obtain any job they want--even if they have the ability for such jobs. The earliest theoretical statements are cognizant of limitations on choice. Ginzberg et al. (1951) and Blau et al. (1956) explicitly describe vocational choices as compromises between desires and expectations based on reality. Super (1957) also discussed the role that the economic and social environment play in restricting occupational choices. Recent statements by other theorists (e.g., Krumboltz et al., 1978) continue to include economic and social factors as influences on job entry. And Osipow (1969) has also suggested that more attention be focused on situational determinants and how they can be controlled.

Nevertheless, if one examines the foci of recent developmental theories and the counseling tools developed from them, the implications of limitations on choice appear to be ignored. Krumboltz et al. (1978) clearly outline environmental factors that influence career aspirations throughout development, but one gets no sense that they recognize the barriers people face because their counseling recommendations focus entirely on the improvement of client decision-making skills (e.g., see page 127) and not on the environment. Development is conceptualized as the result of the interaction of person and environment in Super's influential work, but research in that tradition has usually focused on the assessment of vocational maturity, the readiness of individuals to make choices (e.g., see Super, 1974; Crites, 1961; Walsh, 1979). We might wonder, though, about the usefulness of focusing too much on client characteristics such as vocational maturity and too little on vocational opportunities. As Harmon (1974, p. 83) notes, "... if the choices available to some individuals, i.e., minority group members, women, and the

poor, are largely limited by sociocultural factors which the individual cannot control no matter how mature he or she is vocationally, perhaps counselors would do well to avoid putting too many eggs in the vocational maturity basket and devote some of their efforts to changing the labor market rather than clients." The same caution should be made for the interest assessments provided by the older trait-factor approach to vocational counseling. As valuable as these tools may be, we should not "put too many eggs" in the interest inventory basket either.

The relevance of measures of vocational maturity to minority group status has been discussed in the literature, but in a way that ignores the limitations on opportunity that minorities or any disadvantaged persons probably face. For example, in Measuring Vocational Maturity for Counseling and Evaluation (Super, 1974) the chapter devoted to minority groups (LoCascio, 1974) focuses entirely on the question of whether measures of vocational maturity are culture-fair or not. This question is raised by that author because blacks tend to get lower vocational maturity scores than do whites. LoCascio suggests that we should not be hasty in judging blacks less mature, but should perhaps instead adopt cultural pluralism as the proper perspective by which to view these differences. However, it may be more useful to investigate the possibility that realistically less optimistic expectations for career development are held by minorities and partly account for their lower maturity scores. Examination of individual items in Crites' (1973b) Attitude Scale for the Career Maturity Inventory suggests that this may be the case (e.g. "work is dull and unpleasant," "you get into an occupation mostly by chance," "I really can't find any work that has much appeal to me," "the most important part of work is the pleasure which

comes from doing it," "your job is important because it determines how much you can earn"). We mention this issue to show that some groups of youngsters may be considerably less optimistic than researchers and counselors have traditionally been about career opportunities. Kerckhoff and Campbell (1977), for example, show that lower-class and minority youngsters do perceive fewer opportunities for themselves than do other youngsters and also that a sense of fatalism is inversely related to educational ambition level. We mention it also to show how pervasive is the tendency to overrate the usefulness (or harmfulness) of existing assessment devices and to ignore the environment which shapes responses to those devices and which continues to channel vocational behavior regardless of any future changes in test scores. The object, then, should not necessarily be to revise the assessment to make it more "fair" (i.e., to show fewer differences), but to understand more clearly to what extent the concept of vocational maturity is useful for counseling, particularly for counseling the disadvantaged. Once again, the same observation could be made about vocational interests.

Counselors may legitimately disagree about their proper role and their ability to change the opportunities clients have. But they should be ready to respond to Gordon (1968, p. 166) who says that if a vocational counselor "sees his job as primarily working with the individual, so that he is presumably better able to take advantage of the limited opportunities that are available, he will be doing only half his job, and the easier half..." If vocational theorists and researchers are to provide guidance to counselors, they must balance the weight of their concern over clients' vocational interests and decision-making abilities with a greater weight on investigating how the environment structures the choices available to different groups of

individuals. This is true whether or not vocational counselors can actually change opportunities for their clients, because the information could be used at least to help predict adjustment problems and to design special counseling strategies. However, more attention might be profitably spent on teaching clients job search skills (e.g., see Wegmann, 1979) and how to make the most of their opportunities for securing a job and being successful on it.

(2) Characteristics of environments and how they influence career development should receive more systematic attention.

If we believe that opportunities are limited by the environment, we need to know more about that environment.

Career development (e.g., Super, 1957; Krumboltz et al., 1978) as well as differentialist theories (e.g., Holland & Gottfredson, 1976) conceptualize career development in terms of the interaction of persons with their environments, but the environmental side of the equation has received the least attention. The person-job (trait-factor) matching schemes explicitly describe different occupational environments, but they too have stimulated only sketchy information about the distribution of such environments (e.g., their availability to different populations) and about the role of family, peer, school, neighborhood, and community environments. We need more information about the primacy of each of these environments for influencing both the development of vocational preferences (e.g., by providing role models, providing information or stereotypes about occupations, or fostering interests and abilities) and occupational opportunities at the time of job search (e.g., by providing information about schooling, training, and job openings).

In earlier papers we and our colleagues (G. Gottfredson, Holland & Gottfredson, 1975; G. Gottfredson, 1977; L. Gottfredson, 1978, 1979) have

examined the availability of different types of jobs and discussed how this distribution might influence job satisfaction, competition in finding certain jobs, mid-career shifts, and other aspects of career development. We also suggested the need for examining the distribution of other career-relevant environments to which youngsters are exposed and the usefulness of providing a more systematic portrayal of the developmental tasks these environments pose at different ages and for different populations (e.g., males vs. females, lower- vs. middle-class youngsters).

Krumboltz et al.'s (1978) social learning theory of career selection was suggested as an excellent point for beginning such an examination. One could take the environmental conditions and events they list (pp. 102-103) and specify the opportunities for instrumental and associative learning experiences (pp. 104-105) these conditions present. Estimates of the availability of these opportunities to different populations at different ages would provide content for the learning propositions they put forward (pp. 114-126). Not only would this exercise be useful for understanding development, but it could also help counselors pinpoint what problems the environment of the client has posed or continues to pose for the client. In addition, knowing more about the events experienced by individuals in particular client populations might also help in designing more effective counseling systems.

As mentioned above, the relative importance of different environments should also be examined. Reference to the sociological literature on status attainment, particularly the body of work referred to as the social-psychological status attainment and life cycle models, would be useful in future work on this question. Much of that literature is devoted to assessing the relative importance of different socioeconomic (e.g., family social

class) and psychological (e.g., parental encouragement) influences on the development of aspiration levels. It also examines the importance of aspiration level as a mediator of those influences on actual job level attained as well as an independent contributor to level obtained. Sewell and his colleagues (e.g., Sewell & Shah, 1968a, 1968b; Haller & Portes, 1973; Sewell & Hauser, 1975; Sewell, Hauser, & Featherman, 1976) have been central contributors to this literature. Whether or not vocational researchers find their methods (primarily regression and path analysis) and environmental variables suitable, the emphasis in tracing the influences of different socioeconomic conditions on aspirations and attainments throughout the life cycle and their estimates of the relative magnitude of those influences should be of heuristic value. Kelso (Note 2) exemplifies an effort to incorporate this literature into the study of vocational choice.

(3) Recognize that occupational status preferences may be circumscribed at a very young age, long before the age at which developmental theorists assess readiness to make decisions and the ages during which they assume youngsters develop vocational maturity.

As discussed earlier, large net changes in aspirations for category of work occur among men between ages 15 and 28, the ages examined here. This is consistent with developmental notions that exploration and crystallization occur over a long period of development which extends into early adulthood. The picture is different, however, if we examine aspirations for level of work. On the average, level of aspiration hardly changes at all among the men studied here. If any major adjustment to reality has occurred for level of aspiration within either social class considered here, it appears to have occurred at earlier ages because there are large differences in the level of aspirations held by lower- and middle-class men. These

results imply early differentiation and stability of status-level aspirations and are consistent not only with the sociological research mentioned earlier but also with considerable evidence in vocational psychology (see Osipow, 1973, for a review) that values and preferences develop earlier than expected according to the stages outlined by Super (1957) and Ginzberg et al. (1951).

To understand vocational choices more completely we must know more about the early processes whereby youngsters circumscribe their choices. Self-concept, perhaps the central concept in developmental theory, could be broken down into more specific components (such as Krumboltz et al.'s [1978] self-observation generalizations) that could be individually traced back into early childhood. The development of the concepts of one's own social position, race, sex, abilities, values, and interests may proceed at different rates, the first three probably developing before the latter three. Children may be aware of the jobs "people like them" usually hold and so circumscribe their aspirations to conform to their social-race-sex self-concepts long before they explore the suitability of their abilities, interests, and values to their remaining options. Vocational theorists attend primarily to ability self-concepts, interests, and values. But to explore only the latter stages of self-concept development may be to miss the major role of self-concept in career development.

Dilemmas and Solutions

One implication of the foregoing is that counselors (and vocational maturity and interest assessments) may really be dealing primarily with the vestiges of choice. Whether one views this as an appropriate role for

counselors depends on one's goals for society as well as for individual clients. If one assumes that the early circumscription of aspirations on the basis of race, sex, social class, or other social attributes is "unfair," one might advocate routinely broadening the aspirations of clients and not reinforcing those earlier choices. This was essentially the argument of those claiming that interest inventories are sex biased because men and women score differently on them (see Tittle & Zytowski, 1978). Whether one considers this development unfair in some sense, it is nevertheless likely that it is exceedingly difficult to alter after childhood. Furthermore, if this circumscription is the result of implementing one's self-concept, the client may experience the attempt by a counselor or an interest inventory to change the client's range of choices as an attack on his or her self-concept. These latter arguments were advanced by the defenders of interest inventories in the sex bias controversy (see see Tittle & Zytowski, 1978).

We mention the interest inventory sex bias controversy not to revive it, but to further illustrate the issues we have been raising and to put them into perspective. The sex-bias controversy arose from a value judgment by some people about the fairness of sex differences in responses to interest inventories. The same judgment could be made with respect to race, social class, or even ability, because vocational aspirations differ by race, class, and ability and these differences appear early in life as is the case with sex differences (e.g., Sewell & Shah, 1968a, 1968b; Kerckhoff & Campbell, 1977). But the same cautions that we should have learned from the sex bias controversy can be applied to any future discussion of race or social class. Those cautions are that it is not clear what counselors <u>can</u> do about changing the aspirations of different populations, nor is it clear what actions are <u>ethical</u> or advisable.

These questions are difficult to answer and they are socio-moral ones as well as empirical. But our paper raises another difficult issue which was not discussed in the sex-bias debate but which is nevertheless relevant to it. And it is essential in any discussion of improving opportunities for clients. The issue is that opportunities are limited, not just for some segments of the population, but for the population as a whole. If this is true, then fulfillment of aspirations may be a zero-sum game unless our society somehow produces people who largely want what they get (see G. Gottfredson et al., 1975, for discussion of this possibility) or unless the limits of the system are stretched through job redesign or other strategies (cf. Warnath, 1974). The limits of the system are implicitly acknowledged in studies on the "unrealism" of vocational choices because as Crites (1969: p. 316) notes, "The typical design of studies which have indicated unrealism in choice has been to compare the distribution of choices of high school and college students with the distribution of workers in occupations." Such studies generally imply that unrealism is undesirable. Although others might argue that promoting realism is promoting the status quo, our counseling strategies nevertheless focus on adjusting the individual rather than the environment. By focusing on manipulating aspirations, our counseling strategies may in effect range from promoting aspirations which cannot be fulfilled to promoting more competition between less and more advantaged populations (cf. L. Gottfredson, 1979). None of these strategies alters the fact that many people end up with undesirable jobs, although we all might have opinions about which strategies are fairer.

In sum, designing more effective and fair counseling strategies requires tackling some difficult questions: How do aspirations influence

career development? How do environmental circumstances influence the development and implementation of aspirations for both category and level of work? And what are the realistic prospects and ethical considerations for changing the aspirations and circumstances of individuals--and of whole groups of people?

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Table 1

The Validity of Current Job[a] and of Current Aspiration for Predicting Later Job[b] Over One- to Five-Year Intervals

(Kappas)

Age in 1966	Year in Which Job or Aspiration was Measures to Predict 1971 Job									
	1966		1967		1968		1969		1970	
	κ	(N)	κ	(N)	κ	(N)	κ	(N)	κ	(N)
					Job					
15-16	.10	(180)	.04	(171)	.14	(166)	.36	(155)	.40	(164)
17-18	.22	(279)	.27	(237)	.35	(212)	.41	(208)	.54	(253)
19-20	.33	(236)	.41	(208)	.51	(204)	.63	(210)	.71	(224)
21-22	.43	(296)	.48	(283)	.56	(284)	.72	(286)	.73	(286)
23-24	.49	(393)	.59	(377)	.64	(387)	.67	(384)	.72	(391)
					Aspiration					
15-16	.13	(181)	.14	(154)	.23	(149)	.36	(139)	.32	(144)
17-18	.28	(281)	.34	(214)	.39	(194)	.41	(194)	.35	(230)
19-20	.37	(238)	.49	(190)	.46	(187)	.46	(191)	.47	(195)
21-22	.34	(298)	.41	(257)	.42	(264)	.48	(259)	.51	(260)
23-24	.48	(396)	.51	(339)	.53	(369)	.59	(364)	.63	(358)

[a] Current job refers in 1967, 1968, 1969, and 1970 to current job or to last job if not currently employed. The table includes only men who were employed in both 1966 and 1971. N's are lower in intervening years because some men were not located or were in the military those years.

[b] The job predicted was the job held in 1971.

Table 2

Mean Status of Aspirations Held in 1966 and of Jobs Held in 1971: By social class background and age cohort

Age in 1966	Aspiration in 1966	Job in 1971	Mean Difference	(N)
		Lower-class men		
15-16	45	29	16	(89)
17-18	41	29	12	(133)
19-20	43	33	10	(121)
21-22	47	36	11	(142)
23-24	44	36	8	(202)
		Middle-class men		
15-16	60	36	24	(82)
17-18	57	43	14	(135)
19-20	63	50	13	(101)
21-22	58	46	12	(134)
23-24	59	56	3	(171)

Note: Includes only men employed and expressing an aspiration in both in both years.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Categorical stability of aspirations and type of job over a one-year interval.

Note. Figure includes only men employed and expressing an aspiration in both years. N's for the seven age groups are, respectively, 160, 454, 601, 646, 741, 676, and 395.

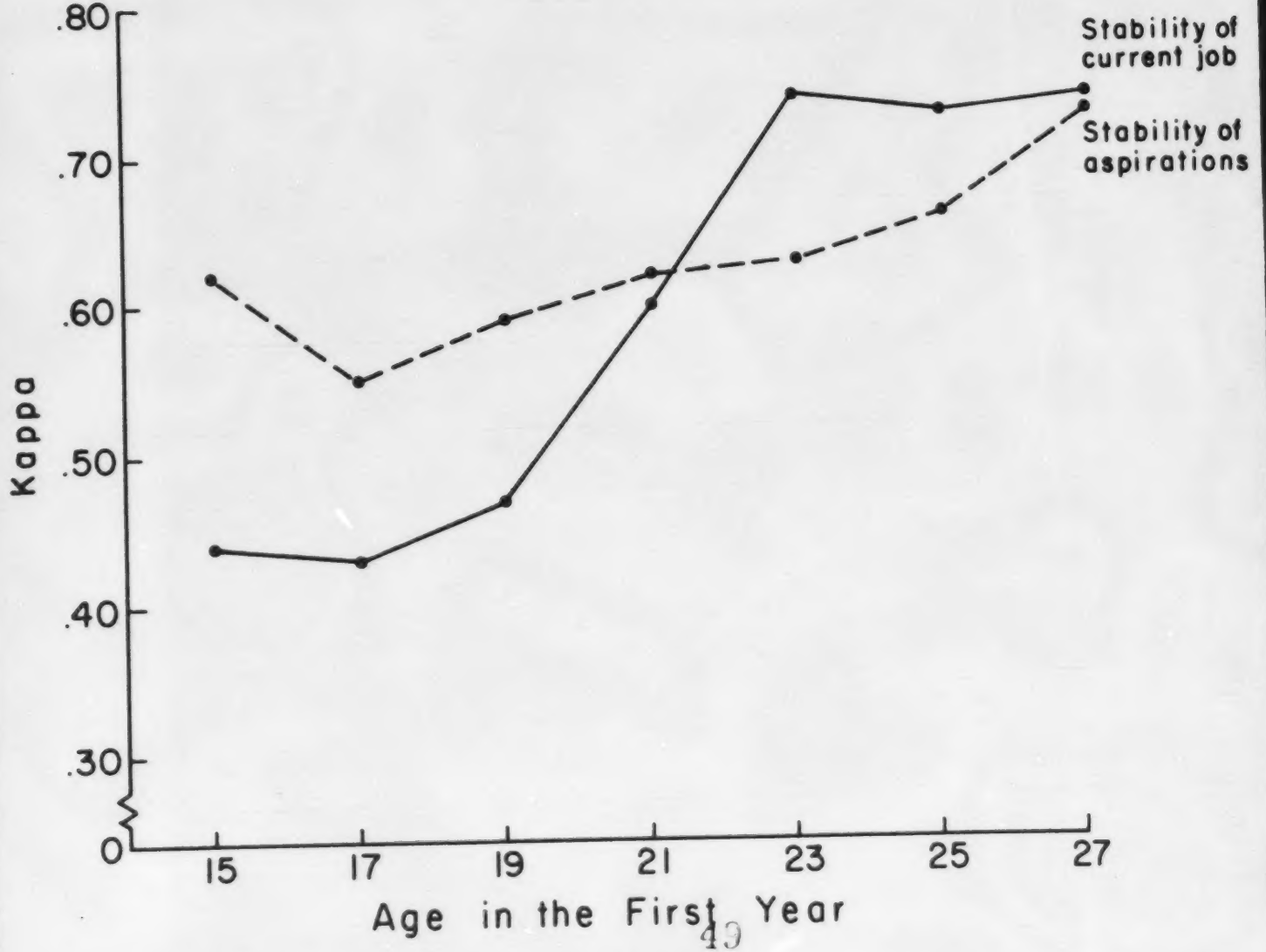

.80
.70
.60
.50
.40
.30
0
Kappa
15
17
19
21
23
25
27
Age in the First Year
Stability of current job
Stability of aspirations

Figure Caption

Figure 2. Changes from incongruence to congruence over a one-year interval and mode by which congruence is achieved.

Note. N's for the seven age groups are, respectively, 101, 239, 277, 275, 233, 192, and 72.

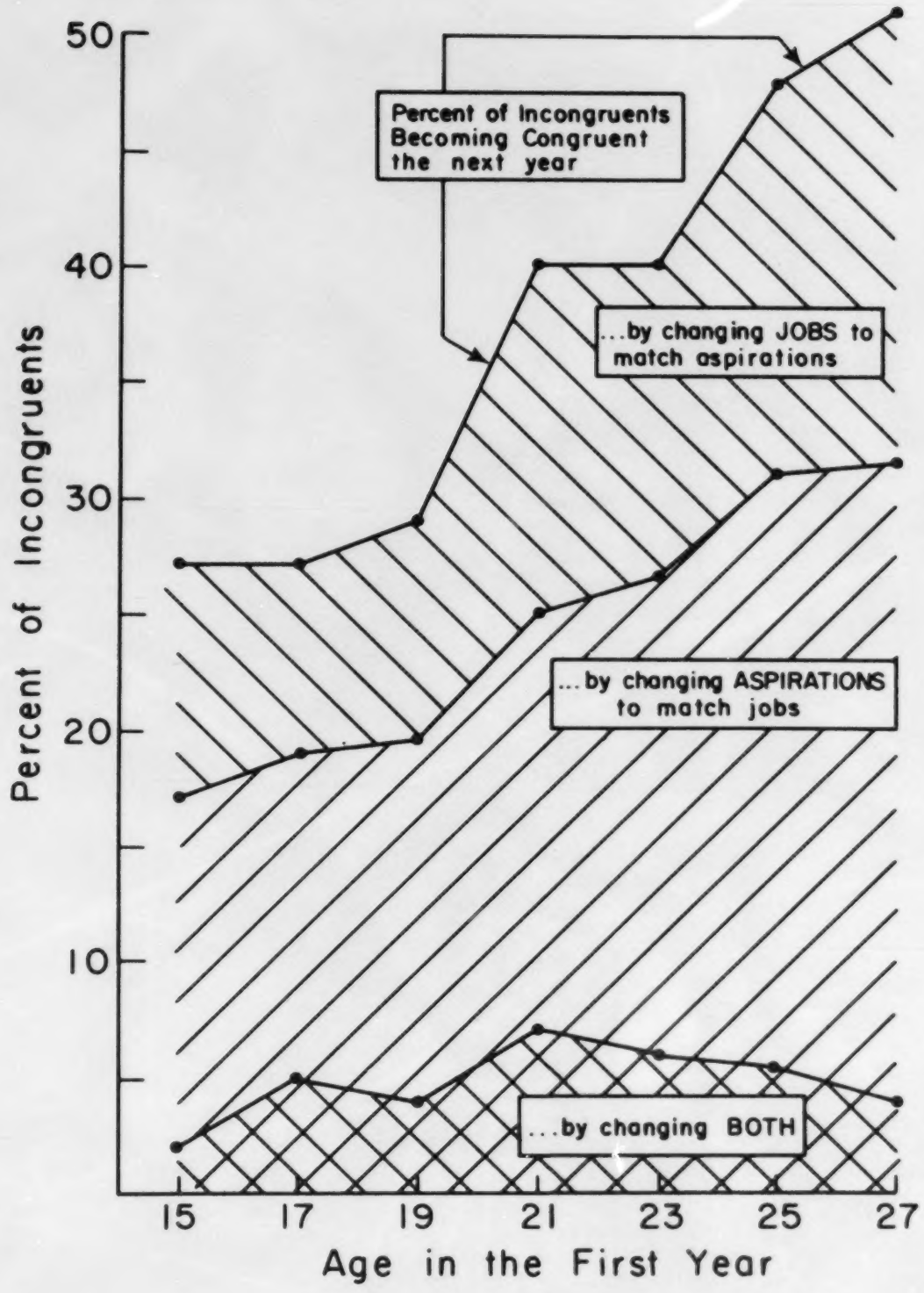

50
40
30
20
10
Percent of Incongruents
Percent of Incongruents Becoming Congruent the next year
...by changing JOBS to match aspirations
... by changing ASPIRATIONS to match jobs
...by changing BOTH
15
17
19
21
23
25
27
Age in the First Year

Figure Caption

Figure 3. The validity of earlier aspirations and jobs for predicting category of later job.

Note. Figure constructed from data in Table 1 as described in the text.

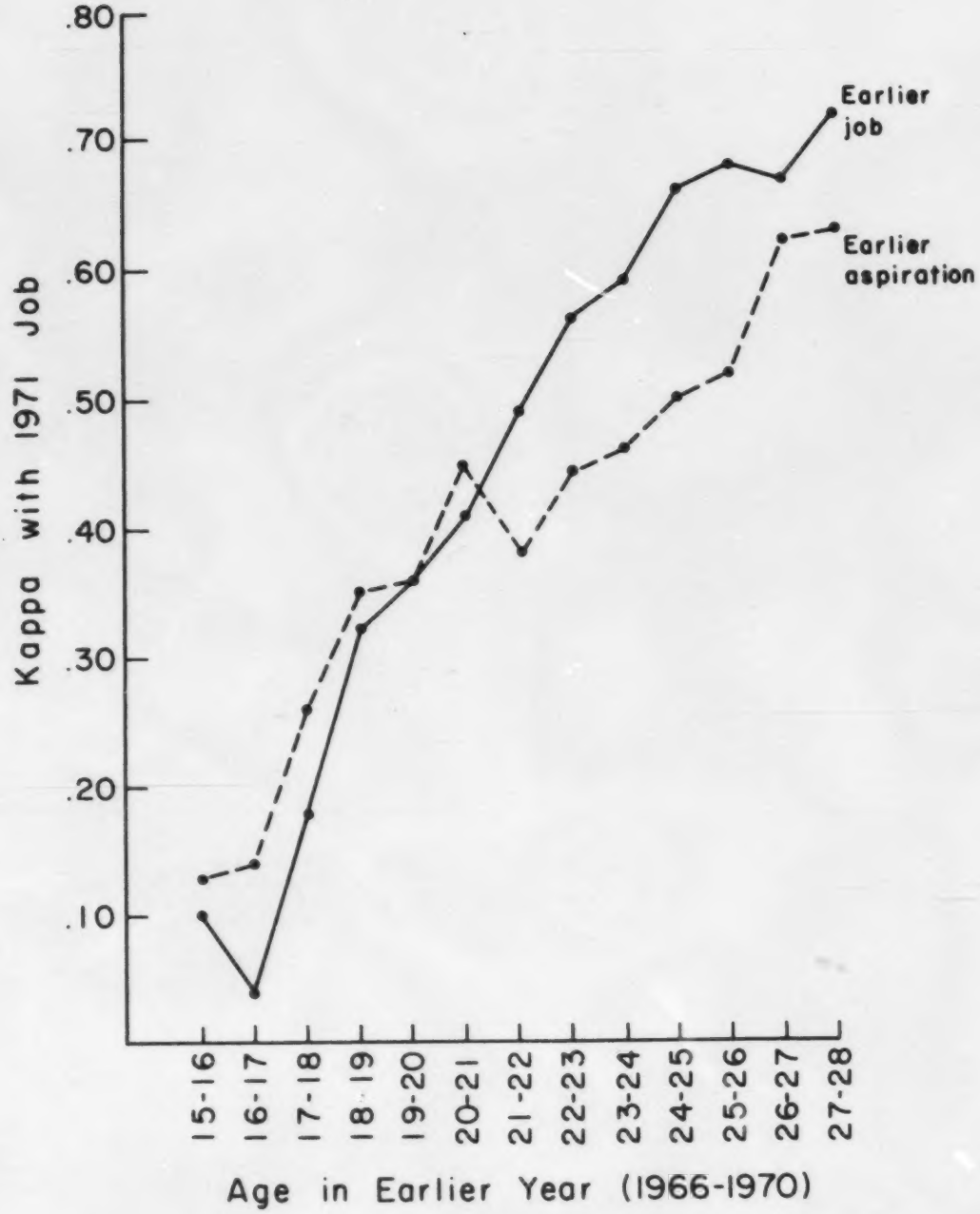
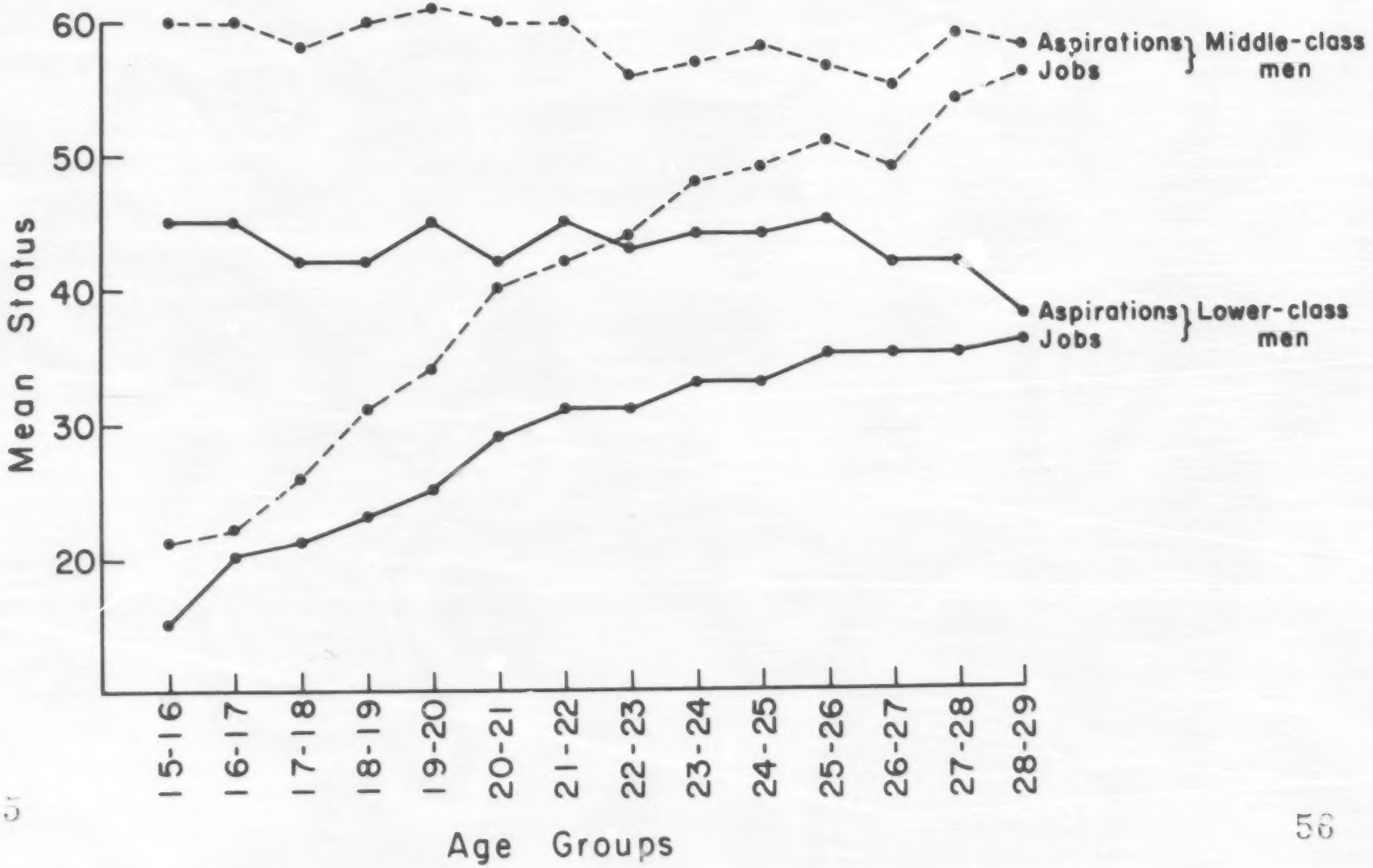

.80
.70
.60
.50
.40
.30
.20
.10
Kappa with 1971 Job
Earlier job
Earlier aspiration
15-16
16-17
17-18
18-19
19-20
20-21
21-22
22-23
23-24
24-25
25-26
26-27
27-28
Age in Earlier Year (1966-1970)

Figure Caption

Figure 4. Mean status of aspirations and of jobs for men of different ages and socioeconomic backgrounds.


60
50
40
30
20
Mean Status
Aspirations
Jobs
Middle-class men
Aspirations
Jobs
Lower-class men
15-16
16-17
17-18
18-19
19-20
20-21
21-22
22-23
23-24
24-25
25-26
26-27
27-28
28-29
Age Groups